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C O N F I D E N T I A L ASUNCION 000212

SIPDIS

STATE WHA/BSC
STATE PASS TO USAID LAC/AA
NSC FOR KIMBERLY BREIER
SOUTHCOM FOR POLAD DAN JOHNSON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/10/2015
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [CU](#) [CO](#) [VE](#) [PA](#)
SUBJECT: CUBAN MEDICAL SUPPORT TO PARAGUAY AND AN OPENING
WITH PRESIDENT DUARTE

REF: ASUNCION 188

Classified By: CDA Kevin M. Johnson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: The ending of the Cuban Doctor program by the GOP, and concurrent GOP fears of increased ominous leftist influence and activities, presents an opportunity for the USG to draw President Duarte farther away from the allure of Cuba and Venezuela. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Reftel noted GOP Health Ministry announcement that the GOP would end the Cuban Doctor program in December when the current group completes their tour and the bilateral agreement covering the program will lapse. Post believes this decision is directly linked to foreign involvement in crime and subversion in Paraguay.

13. (C) There was no/no GOP indication of also ending the Cuban scholarship program, which sends poor Paraguayans to medical school in Cuba. However, VP Castiglioni told Charge Feb 8 that he strongly favors ending this program as well. He said many students returned from Cuba with polluted minds about politics and also about issues such as abortion. This undermines Paraguayan values and foments conflict, especially in rural areas, including his home department of San Pedro. Supreme Court President Fretes told Charge separately that some Colorado party activists were urging Duarte to reduce GOP ties to both Cuba and Venezuela.

14. (C) Charge asked VFM Martinez Feb. 10 if there were plans to also end the Cuban scholarship program. He said he knew of no official proposal to do this, but said the MFA was sympathetic to ending this program. There had not been any reaction from the Cuban government to the announcement about the doctors program, he said, and the GOP has not/not formally informed the Cuban government of this decision (at least not through the MFA.) Charge said the Cuban ambassador had not raised the issue with the MFA. (Note: MFA bilateral Director Valdez is scheduled to visit Cuba for an annual review of bilateral relations next week. He told Charge he had no/no instructions about this issue at all; he said the Health Ministry handled the entire medical program and the selection process for the next group of scholarship grantees is almost complete. Asked what he would say to the GOC when it asked him about this decision in Havana he said: &this issue is not in my portfolio, and I will tell them that, unless I get new instructions.8 End note.) Post is still seeking Health Ministry views on the scholarship issue.

15. (C) Comment: The President is much closer to the Health Minister than to the FM, and is likely driving this process personally. This leaves others puzzled as to next steps and the absence of a coherent policy, but is an opportunity for post to re-enforce increased concerns about foreign, subversive, and leftist influence in Paraguay; post is engaging allies within the GOP and others with influence to take advantage of this opening. Many here, especially the VP, who will visit Bogota soon, hope Colombia can be a major partner on these issues. It is unclear how far NDF,s apparent anger about FARC activity here will take him in reviewing broader policy toward Cuba and Venezuela, but we should seek to find out. A scheduled visit by MCC Threshold Plan Director Kevin Saba Feb 16-19 provides a timely reminder of our extensive positive relationship with Paraguay. Dept. might consider other means to take advantage of NDF,s increased suspicions of Cuba and Venezuela through visits, telcons, bilateral meetings at multilateral events, etc. Duarte may not have been born again ideologically, but recent events here have opened his eyes to the dangers Paraguay faces from the FARC and its allies. End Comment.
JOHNSON